## CHAPTER V

### TEXAS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

THE vast territory of Texas, comprising 268,684 square miles, was very thinly peopled at the time of the beginning of the struggle for independence. The whole of the northern and the greater portion of the central part were still in the condition in which they were at the time of the arrival of La Salle on the shore of Matagorda Bay in 1685. This region was inhabited only by wandering tribes of Indians, some of them the native aborigines, Comanches, Wacos, Lipans and their congeners, and others fragments of the tribes, Cherokees, Choctaws, Delawares and Shawnees, who had been driven from their homes in the United States by the aggressions of the whites. Among the Indians were a few white hunters and trappers, scarcely less wild and uncivilized in their habits than the savages, the occasional wandering traders, who bartered ammunition and trinkets for furs at the risk of their lives, and the American and Mexican drovers, who chased and gathered in cavayards of the wild mustang ponies for the Louisiana and San Antonio markets. But permanent habitations there were none in all this vast

region of prairie and forest, and the picket posts of civilization in the shape of settlers' cabins had not been planted beyond the boundaries of the empresario's colonies, and the sheltering timber of the principal streams. There were small towns in the interior, San Antonio, Nacogdoches, Goliad, and others, which dated from the time of the early Spanish colonization, or which had grown around the Missions established by the Franciscan friars for the conversion and civilization of the Indians; and there were seaports or landing places on the coast, Galveston, Brazoria, Velasco and Copano, which were the result of the necessity for sea communication for supplies and trade. There were agricultural colonies founded under grants of land from the Mexican government to empresarios or contractors, Austin's, De Witt's, De Leon's, and the Irish colony of McMullin and McGloire, of various degrees of strength and permanence, and others which were merely such in name, and were used for fraudulent speculation in land scrip, or merely the chimæras of over-sanguine projectors. In these colonies, and notably in that of Austin, were the germs of the Anglo-American occupation of Texas, and its conquest from the nominal domination of the Hispano-Mexicans.

In 1834 Colonel Juan Nepomuceno Almonte made a tour of inspection through Texas, by direction of the Mexican government, to report upon its population, trade, and general condition. Almonte was an

officer of intelligence and good judgment. He was, according to tradition, the son of the patriot priest Moreles, the leader of the Mexican revolt against Spain, had been thoroughly educated in the United States, and was at that time thirty years of age, colonel and aid-de-camp to President Santa Anna. His report is the only statistical account of the condition of Texas at that period, and, although obviously imperfect, affords ground for reasonable estimate and conjecture.

Colonel Almonte estimated the total population of Texas at 36,300, of whom 21,000 were whites and negroes, and 15,300 Indians. It must be said, of course, that this estimate of the Indian population was the sheerest guess-work, and it might have been put at any merely arbitrary figure. Neither was there any means for an accurate census of the civilized population, and a variation of several thousands, either way, was quite possible. Texas at that time was divided into three departments, Bexar, Brazos, and Nacogdoches.

There were four municipalities or districts in Bexar, the western department, whose population was as follows: San Antonio, 2400; Goliad, 700; Victoria, 300; San Patricio, the Irish colony, 600. The population of Bexar, with the exception of the Irish colony, was exclusively Mexican, and it had diminished since the last report in 1806 from 6400 to 3400. There was but one school in the department, at San Antonio, and that was so miserably

supported as to be practically of no value. There was but one priest in the whole region. The condition of the population of Bexar was evidently but little above barbarism, the people living by rude agriculture and their flocks and herds, and being less civilized and prosperous than under the Spanish dominion in the early part of the century. The whole export trade consisted of from 8000 to 10,000 skins and furs, and the imports were only a few supplies from New Orleans, exchanged for peltry at San Antonio.

The population of Brazos, the central department, which included the prosperous colony of Austin, was estimated at 8000, of whom 1000 were negroes, nominally only servants under the Mexican laws, but in reality slaves. The municipalities were San Felipe de Austin, the capital of the colony, with a population of 2500; Columbia, 2100; Matagorda, 1400; Gonzales, 900; Mina, 1100. The exports consisted of a yearly average of 5000 bales of cotton, returning, at New Orleans, $225,000; 50,000 skins, valued at $50,000; and a large quantity of beeves and other livestock driven to the market at Natchitoches, Louisiana, of which no estimate was given. The maize and other cereals were all consumed at home. The colonists owned large herds of cattle and droves of hogs, which fed wild on the prairie. There was but one school in the department, at Brazoria, with about forty pupils. The wealthier colonists sent their children to the United States to be educated, and "those, who

have not the advantages of fortune, care little for the education of their sons, provided they can wield the axe and cut down a tree, or kill a deer with dexterity."

The total population of Nacogdoches, the eastern department, was estimated at 9900. It had four municipalities, with the population as follows: Nachidoches, 3500; San Augustine, 2500; Liberty, 1000; Johnsbury, 1000. The town of Anahuac had a population of 50; Bevil, 140; Tanaha, 100; Teran, 10. In this department were about 1000 negroes, brought by their masters from the United States. Colonization in Nacogdoches had not been prosperous, owing to the fact that the empresarios, Burnett, Zavala, and Vehlein, had sold their contracts to speculators in New York and elsewhere, who made no attempt at the settlement of immigrants, but simply disposed of the land scrip to whomever they could persuade to buy by means of flaming circulars and illusory promises. There was a constant conflict of titles between the immigrants and the original settlers or squatters, and the consequences were very injurious to the growth and prosperity of the colony. The trade of Nacogdoches was estimated at $470,000. The exports consisted of 2000 bales of cotton, 40,000 skins, and 50,000 head of cattle. The imports were estimated at $265,000.

The total trade of Texas for the year 1834, exports and imports, was estimated at $1,400,000, which included a contraband trade through the ports of Bra-

zoria, Matagorda and Copano, conjectured to amount to $270,000. Says the report: "Money is very scarce in Texas, not one in ten sales being made for cash. Purchases are made on credit or by barter, which gives the country the appearance of a continued fair." Almonte declared Texas to be "the bravest of our provinces," and urged retired army officers to capitalize their pay and go and colonize the country. "There they will find peace and industry, and that rest for their old age, which, in all probability, they will not find in the centre of the republic," — a remark which indicated that Almonte had not formed a very accurate estimate of the prospects of an attempt to Mexicanize Texas by colonization, however sound his judgment of the prospects of tranquillity in the mother country.

The real root and foundation of the prosperity and growth of Texas was in the colony of Stephen F. Austin on the Brazos.

The Mexican settlements in Bexar had none of the elements of progress and civilization, and had rather degenerated than advanced in the past half century. It simply contributed an outlying and rural province of Mexico, without the mineral riches and agricultural development which had given wealth and a certain amount of civilization to the central provinces.

The American settlements in Nacogdoches, although of older date than Austin's colony, had been seriously injured by the fact that the "neutral ground," which had existed beyond the Sabine be-

tween the boundaries of the United States and Mexico, had been the Alsatia of the criminal refugees of both countries, and the favorite retreat of the desperadoes of the Southwest. Once beyond the muddy waters of the Sabine, criminals were safe from all molestation, except at the hands of their fellows, and for many years they had dominated the country, making life and property unsafe for the travelers and settlers. Here were gathered the murderers and manslayers who had escaped from the hands of justice in the States, the bandits and robbers, banished members of gangs like that of the famous John A. Murrell which had exercised a reign of terror in Mississippi, fraudulent debtors who had chalked on their shutters the cabalistic letters "G. T. T." — Gone to Texas, — and the ruffians and desperadoes of every description who lived in an atmosphere of violence, and to whom all law was a mockery. These associates were equally lawless, if not equally criminal, and it was a society in which every one "fought for his own hand."

One of the notable and characteristic figures of this community was Colonel Martin Parmer, known as "The Ring Tailed Panther." Parmer had lived in Missouri in the Indian wilderness, among the Osages and Iowas, and his feats of savage daring and eccentricity were the gossip of the border. On one occasion he was said to have stood with a drawn knife over a savage named "Two Heart," who had devoured the heart of a white man he had killed, and compelled

him to eat until he died of repletion. He sent fifty miles for a minister to preach a sermon over the body of a favorite bear dog. With all this he was a man of ability, had been a member of the Constitutional Convention of Missouri, and an efficient Indian agent.

The outlaws of the neutral ground organized themselves into bands, and fought over land titles and for political domination, and in 1826 commenced a war against the Mexican authorities under the leadership of Hayden Edwards, an empresario, whose contract had been annulled on account of the conflicts which had arisen between the claims of his colonists and the original Mexican inhabitants and squatters. This émeute, called "The Fredonian War," was easily suppressed, Austin and his colonists taking part with the Mexican authorities.

These troubles, the presence of a large body of Cherokee Indians, who had settled in the country under a concession of the Mexican government, and the difficulties arising from the sale of fraudulent and conflicting land titles, had been a serious drawback to the permanent and prosperous settlement of eastern Texas, which would naturally have been the first in growth, owing to its neighborhood to the United States. At this time it had recovered from the worst of its lawlessness, and was securing a better class of emigrants; but it was yet not attractive to the orderly and progressive colonists, such as had gathered under the government and direction of Austin.

Stephen F. Austin, who justly deserves the title given him by Houston, of "The Father of Texas," was born in Austinville, Virginia, in 1793. His father, Moses Austin, was a native of Durham, Connecticut, and had spent an enterprising and adventurous life in developing lead mines in Virginia and the Missouri Territory. His operations in the latter region proving financially unprofitable, he turned his attention toward Texas, of whose beauty and fertility he had heard much from explorers and Spanish traders. In 1820 he set out for Texas. He was at first coldly received by Governor Martinez of San Antonio, but by the aid of the Baron de Bastrop, a Prussian officer, who had served under Frederick the Great, and was then in the service of Mexico, he obtained a favorable hearing on his proposition to settle a colony of emigrants from the United States in Texas. Austin's petition was forwarded to the central government, and he returned home. On the route he was robbed and stripped by his fellow-travelers, and, after great exposure and privation, subsisting for twelve days on acorns and pecan nuts, he reached the cabin of a settler near the Sabine River. He reached home in safety, and commenced his preparations for removal to Texas; but his exposure and privations had weakened his vital forces, and he died from the effects of a cold in his fifty-seventh year, leaving his dying injunction to his son, Stephen, to carry out his project.

The response from Mexico was favorable. A concession was made for the settlement of three hundred

families on the condition of their professing the Roman Catholic religion and promising fidelity to the Spanish government. The grants included 640 acres of land for each head of a family or single man, 320 acres for the wife, 160 acres for each child, and eighty acres for each slave. The premium to the empresario was five square leagues of grazing land and five labores (a labore consisting of 177 acres) for each one hundred families settled, the total number not to exceed 800. Austin visited the country for the purpose of exploration, and selected the country between the Brazos and the Colorado, then an uninhabited wilderness, as the site of his colony.

He returned to Louisiana, and advertised for emigrants. The terms and the adventure were attractive, and he set out with a considerable number of followers by land, having previously dispatched the schooner Lively to Matagorda Bay with supplies and agricultural implements. The schooner was lost, and the colony had to begin their settlement with only the means which they had brought with them.

In the mean time the revolution against Spain had been accomplished in Mexico. Austin was obliged to make the long and perilous journey of 1200 miles to the city of Mexico, which he accomplished on foot and in the disguise of a common soldier, in order to obtain a renewal of his grant. He obtained a renewal from the Emperor Iturbide, and was about to return home, when the revolution, headed by Santa

Anna, drove Iturbide from the throne, and he was compelled to make another application to the Mexican Cortes. In this he was also successful, and, in 1823, after a year's absence, returned to his colony, which had been nearly destroyed by the prolonged uncertainty and discouragement.

Austin renewed his efforts, and the settlers began again to come in. There were the usual difficulties and trials connected with a pioneer settlement. A vessel with supplies was cast away, and another, having run aground, was plundered, and the crew massacred by the Carankawa Indians, a ferocious tribe of the coast. The settlers had to import their seed-corn from beyond the Sabine, or to buy it at San Antonio, where it was scarce and dear. They were obliged to live mainly on wild game, and, the deer and bears being scarce, on account of the drought and failure of the mart, they were reduced to killing the wild horses for food. The women as well as the men were clad in buckskin garments, and the advent of a stray pack-peddler, with a few yards of flowered calico at fifty cents per yard, was like the arrival of a ship with a cargo of silks in an eastern port. The men were engaged in building cabins and making clearings, hewing down the trees and cutting the cane brakes. In the blackened fields, after the burning of the brush, they planted corn in holes made with sharpened sticks. While at work they kept guard against the Indians, who roved about stealing the stock, at times making a night attack upon a cabin, or mur-

dering and scalping some solitary herdsman or traveler. The Mexicans did nothing to protect or govern the colony. The settlers, with the Anglo-Saxon instinct for law and order, created a code of laws for the administration of justice and the settlement of civil disputes. The land titles were duly recorded, and a local militia was organized. Austin was the supreme authority, the judge and commandant, and ruled the colony with fatherly kindness and practical sagacity, like a tribal patriarch.

The characters of the settlers of Austin's colony were of a much higher type than those of the desperate and criminal refugees in the eastern section. They were sturdy and honest, the best representatives of the hardy adventurers who have led the van of civilization in its march across the American continent, and founded stable, orderly, and prosperous communities. They were wild and adventurous in spirit, with an irresistible longing for the life of the wilderness, for the excitement of danger, and the delight of vigorous achievement. To them the free air of the prairie and the breath of the forest were like the salt scent of the sea-breeze to the ancient viking. Their blood was warm and flamed rapidly into combat; but they were kindly, hospitable, honest, and above all things manly. There was no place among them for the cowardly vices of an artificial society. There is a universal testimony as to their honesty and hospitality. Even a prejudiced observer, like Charles Hooten, an English author of some tempo-

rary note, who wrote a vituperative book about Texas in 1840, testifies that it was the common custom to leave the doors unfastened when the house was empty, and that seldom or never was anything disturbed. So late as after the close of the Mexican war, Major Hutter, the United States paymaster, detailed to settle the claims of the Texas soldiers, traveled through the country with half a million dollars in gold in his ambulance, without an escort, and met with no interruption or molestation. The fact of his journey was well known, and the places where he would pay the claimants were announced in the newspapers, so that robbers could have had every opportunity to waylay him, while there were often places on his route where the houses were from fifteen to twenty miles apart. No man took another's note for a loan, the verbal promise of payment being considered sufficient, and all the transactions of business were conducted on a fully warranted trust in the general integrity. Even those who had left the States on account of pecuniary failure or dishonesty came under the influence of the standard of honesty about them, and in some instances remitted the sums due to their distant creditors. This was the case with Captain Moseley Baker, one of the heroes of San Jacinto, who had fled from the United States on account of a forgery, and who afterward sent back the amount to the individuals who had lost by it. There were some thefts and depredations upon the colony by wandering rascals

and brigands, but they were dealt with very sternly and summarily. The marauders, when caught, were at first tied and whipped, but, this not proving effectual, recourse was had to Austin for advice. He said that as there were no courts of justice or jails in the colony, they had better follow the marauders, recover the property, but not bring back any of the thieves. The hint was taken. The next time there was a theft the robbers were followed, shot, and the head of one of them cut off and stuck on a pole by the roadside as a significant warning. The justice of Judge Lynch was served out for those crimes which affected the safety of the property, or outraged the sense of propriety in the community, while those which were merely the results of personal quarrel, were left to the arbitrament of the encounter.

As for hospitality, it was more than an obligation, it was an impulse. The saying, "The latchstring hangs out," was more than a proverb, it was a fact of common life. The traveler who rode up to the front fence was instantly invited to alight. His horse was staked out or hoppled to feed on the prairie grass, and the visitor sat down to exchange the news with his host. The coffee-mill was set going, if there were any of the precious grains in the house, and the hopper in the hollowed log to grinding the corn. The venison or bear meat was put on the coals, and the ash-cake baked. After the meal and the evening pipe, the visitor stretched himself on a buffalo robe on the floor with the members of the family, and slept the sleep of

health and fatigue. In the morning the response to any inquiry as to the charge was, "You can pay me by coming again." The story that a certain hospitable settler used to waylay travelers on the road, and compel them to visit him at the muzzle of a double-barreled shot-gun, was only a humorous exaggeration of the instinct for hospitality which characterized the community. The visitor was a living newspaper, who brought the only news obtainable, and was a welcome relief to the monotony and loneliness of the wilderness. When times had changed and the new comers showed themselves more churlish, an old traveler in Texas said that he used to find his quarters for the night by inquiring of the man of the house, "How long have you been in this country?" If the answer was a considerable number of years, or that he "disremembered" just how long it was, the traveler used to alight sure of a hearty welcome.

These men, who were the early settlers of Texas, had in many instances traveled more than a thousand miles in ox-teams, from Missouri or beyond the Mississippi River, amid all the perils and hardships of the wilderness, crossing great tracts of prairie and forest, without a road or trail to mark the way, rafting their teams over swollen streams and surmounting all natural obstacles. They had sometimes been two or three years on the way, halting for a season to raise a crop of corn, and moving on when it was harvested. Children were born in the camps, and the dead were buried by the roadside, with no memorial but a pile of

rocks to preserve the body from being dug up by the wild beasts. The ready rifle supplied game at every halting-place, and insured safety from the wandering savages. Cold and heat made no impression on their hardened frames, and the accidents to flesh and limb were treated with a rough and handy surgery. There were some that perished. The blood-stained ashes of the camp-fire and the plundered wagon showed where the wanderers had been swooped upon by an overpowering band of savages, and the various perils of flood and field counted their victims. But the survivors were of the strongest type of manhood, hardened, by every trial and peril, to the perfection of courage, helpfulness and endurance, the fit kings of the wilderness and founders of great States.

The fascination of the life was irresistible to those under its sway, and took possession of the ministers and missionaries as well as the rough frontiersmen. They fought the Indians, herded stock, and cultivated the ground, when not preaching at neighborhood gatherings in the cabins or building their own churches of logs or stone, and the inspired zeal with which they pursued their sacred calling was stimulated by the passion for the wild and free life of danger and adventure, and the intoxicating breath of the wilderness. Men like the Rev. Z. N. Morrell, the Baptist "cane-brake preacher," and the Abbé Domenech, the Catholic missionary, have testified to this in their written volumes of reminiscences, and it was well-nigh universal with their class.

These pioneers wanted elbow-room and untainted air, and, like Daniel Boone, were uneasy when the smoke of a neighbor's chimney could be seen from their own cabin door. No age could tame their spirit of adventure, and the route of their pioneering sometimes extended half across the continent. There is a story of a Tennessee planter, who removed from his native State to the Red River, from the Red River to Nacogdoches, from Nacogdoches to the Brazos, and from the Brazos to the Colorado. When seen at his last location by a friend he complained of being crowded, and said that he must move again. The settlements on the Colorado were then many miles apart, and the settler was in his eighty-fifth year.

Austin's colony continued to increase, and for a number of years was left undisturbed by the Mexican government, which was going through all the turmoils of the repeated revolutions which followed the overthrow of the Spanish domination. The ordinance requiring the colonists to profess the Catholic Apostolic religion remained a dead letter. No priests were sent into the country, and marriages were performed by the persons joining hands before the alcalde, and agreeing to live together as man and wife. Slaves were introduced under a special clause in Austin's contract, although slavery was not recognized by the Mexican laws. The colonists were exempt from taxation for a term of six years, and they had only to subdue the wilderness and fight the marauding Indians.

But this state of things could not last. It was in-

evitable that the progress of the American colony should arouse the jealousy of the Mexicans, and that the conflict of the antagonistic races for supremacy should begin. By the constitution of 1824, which made Mexico a republic, the territory of Texas was united with the province of Coahuila, under the title of "The State of Coahuila and Texas," and the capital established at Saltillo, five hundred miles from the Texan colony. The two provinces had nothing in common, the one being inhabited by a Mexican and the other by an American population. The government of the State was entirely in the hands of the Mexicans, the Texan representatives in the provincial assembly being limited to two. This created great dissatisfaction among the Texans, and the signs of a growing spirit of interference on the part of the Mexican government caused a feeling of uneasiness and resentment. The jealousy of the Mexican government in regard to the American occupation of Texas was still farther aroused by the proposition on the part of the United States for the purchase of the territory, which was made by the Administration of President Adams, and renewed by that of President Jackson.

In 1830, Anastasio Bustamente, the Vice-President of Mexico, organized a revolution and drove the President Guerrero from power. Bustamente was a sanguinary tyrant, and represented the centralist and anti-liberal party. He issued decrees, prohibiting farther immigration from the United States, forbidding the introduction of any more slaves, and establishing

custom-houses at San Antonio, Nacogdoches, Copano, Velasco and Brazoria for the collection of imposts upon the trade. He also began preparations by making Texas a penal colony, by sending a thousand soldiers, mostly criminals and convicts, to stations in the country.

Bustamente's military commandants soon made themselves obnoxious by their tyranny and impositions. One Colonel John Davis Bradburn, a renegade Virginian, in command of the port of Anahuac at the head of Galveston Bay, proclaimed martial law, released slaves, arrested citizens, and exercised the annoying authority of a petty tyrant. At length all the ports were closed except that at Anahuac, which was very inconvenient for the settlers, as it was outside the limits of Austin's colony, and inaccessible to vessels drawing over six feet of water. An indignation meeting was held at Brazoria, and a committee of citizens appointed to procure a revocation of the order from Bradburn. This, after some equivocation and delay, was granted under the threat of armed resistance. Bradburn next sent a file of soldiers to arrest a number of citizens prominent in the insurrectionary movement. Among them was William B. Travis, the future hero of the Alamo, and Monroe Edwards, an extraordinary individual, who had been engaged in smuggling slaves landed from Africa on the Texas coast into Louisiana. He afterward figured as an abolitionist advocate in England, and, after a notorious and successful criminal career

in Europe and the United States, was convicted of forgery and sentenced to Sing Sing prison, where he died in 1847. The citizens were aroused to resist the arrest, and a force was gathered for the purpose of attacking the fort at Anahuac. At this juncture the news arrived that Santa Anna had organized a revolt against Bustamente, and that another revolution was in progress in Mexico. Colonel Bradburn was deprived of his command by Colonel Piedras, the commandant of Nacogdoches, and retired to the United States.

On July 25 an attack was made on the fort at Velasco by a force of one hundred and twenty-five Texans under the command of Colonel John Austin. A small cannon was placed on a schooner and directed against the fort, and the Texan riflemen, behind a palisade of planks which had been erected during the night, picked off every Mexican soldier who showed himself above the walls. Colonel Ugartchea, who commanded the fort, signalized himself by an act of reckless bravery in standing at his full height upon the walls under fire. This so moved the admiration of the Texans that they did not shoot him. The fort was surrendered after a loss of thirty-five men on the part of the Mexicans, and eight on the part of the Texans. In a short time afterward, Colonel Mexia, an emissary of Santa Anna, arrived with four vessels at the mouth of the Brazos, having with him Stephen F. Austin, the Texan member of the Mexican Congress. Mexia's purpose was to

obtain the adhesion of Texas to the revolutionary movement of Santa Anna, and, after a meeting at San Felipe, it was decided that the troops should be withdrawn from the country. Colonel Piedras, the commandant at Nacogdoches, refused to give his adhesion to the party of Santa Anna, and, after a sharp skirmish in the town, was pursued to the banks of the Angelina River, where he gave up his command, the troops declaring in favor of Santa Anna. The garrison at San Antonio also joined the revolutionary party, and the troops all took their departure for Mexico to join in the warfare against Bustamente. The inhabitants of Texas gave their approval and adhesion to Santa Anna, who had announced himself in favor of the restoration of the Liberal Constitution of 1824, and there was a belief that, with his success, the troubles would be ended, and that Texas would enjoy peace and the privileges of self-government as one of the States of the Republic of Mexico.